

What is CERP? Why should you care?
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You have heard about it, read about it in the paper, seen debates over phosphorous levels, yet what is really happening? What is CERP? Should we really be concerned? Read on and determine for yourself.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan commonly goes by the name of CERP. The plan lays out a 20 to 30 year, \$8 billion process for improving the health of 2.4 million acres of the south Florida ecosystem. The south Florida ecosystem extends 18,000 square miles through 16 counties from Orlando to the Florida Keys. Of course, the system also includes the Everglades.

The name CERP can sometimes be misleading because it implies that restoration will only affect the Everglades, or at least what we know of the Everglades today. In fact, CERP will restore the quality, quantity, timing, and distribution of water that flows through the entire south Florida drainage system, which eventually reaches the coastal areas, including Florida Bay. Currently, water draining into Florida Bay is erratic and inconsistent. Sometimes, large amounts of fresh water flow rapidly into the bay changing the salinity levels drastically in just hours. Other times, little to no fresh water is allowed to flow, making the bay, which once was a true estuary, a hypersaline lagoon. The reality is that without such a plan the health of the south Florida ecosystem, including the Everglades and Florida Bay, will continue to decline. "Status quo" is not a viable option.

CERP provides a framework to guide the use and preservation of water resources throughout the south Florida ecosystem. It includes restoring natural flows of water, increasing water quality, changing the water delivery to a more natural or historical flow, ensuring clean and reliable water supplies, and providing flood protection for south Florida's 6 million residents and the 2 million more that are predicted to move here by 2010.

CERP was developed by a team of biologists, ecologists, economists, engineers, geographic information systems specialists, hydrologists and planners from federal, state, tribal and local government agencies represented on the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. The plan is based on solid science, yet we still do not have all the answers. Throughout the implementation of CERP the team will use the best available data, state-of-the-art scientific and engineering models, and independent peer reviews to evaluate and adapt projects. This adaptive approach allows restoration to move forward and make any necessary corrections along the way.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for most of the research studies on coastal marine ecosystems, living marine resources, and protected species in Florida Bay and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. NOAA is collecting scientific information to provide timely evaluations of the effects of different upstream management alternatives. Understanding the physics and ecology of

Florida Bay and the larger coastal ecosystem is essential to getting restoration right. Downstream recipients of all the upstream changes, healthy natural systems in Florida Keys are indicators of CERP's success.

It is important for Keys' residents to become involved in the process to ensure that it will be done right and meet the needs. Public input can influence projects due to their adaptive nature. Get involved and be part of the solution! Begin by learning more about South Florida Ecosystem Restoration and the local CERP projects.

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